

**Public Scoping Letter  
for the  
Castle Rock Preliminary Fuels Treatment**

Dear Interested Citizen:

April 24, 2003

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Vale District Office, is planning fuels treatment activities in the Castle Rock area (see enclosed map). This letter is to inform you of a proposal to treat fuels within the North Fork Malheur Geographic Management Area (GMA) and solicit your comments so that they may be considered in the planning process. Following this public scoping process, the BLM will prepare an environmental assessment (EA) addressing the proposed action and alternatives which will be available for public comment.

Actions considered in this EA are expected to contribute towards resolving fuels issues identified in the North Fork GMA. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that analyzes the entire GMA is expected to be released for public review in 2004. In order to take advantage of 2003 funding and begin the process of reducing fuels and the associated chance of catastrophic wildfire this project is being proposed prior to the completion of the North Fork Malheur GMA.

**Project Area Description**

The proposed fuels treatment is located on BLM managed lands in the Castle Rock area approximately 20 miles northwest of the town of Juntura, Oregon. The legal description of the project area is as follows: T.18S, R.37 E., Sec. 2, 3, and 4, and, and T.17S., R.37E., Sec. 20, 21, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, and 35. The Castle Rock fuels treatment area is comprised of approximately 1500 acres, characterized primarily by Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir stands.

**Purpose and Need for the Action**

The purpose of this project is to initiate fuels reduction in the Castle Rock area. Forest stands within the proposed project area are dense, and have suffered from insect and disease-related tree mortality. Large amounts of dead and downed material and pine slash can be found throughout the area. Historically, wildfire acted as a natural thinning agent and the removal of fire as an ecosystem maintenance agent has resulted in the accumulation of large quantities of fuel. These dense stand conditions, as well as the presence of large quantities of dead, rotting wood have reduced stand vigor, dramatically increased susceptibility to disease and insect infestation, and significantly raised the potential for a catastrophic stand-replacing fire.

**Proposed Action**

The proposed action is a multi-entry process designed to reduce the fire hazard in the project area. The initial treatment would consist of hand burning slash accumulations and trees that are heavily infected with mistletoe. This treatment would be done by prescription, in the winter or early spring, when there is very little chance of the fire spreading or broadcasting beyond the project area boundaries.

Follow up treatments would include a combination of pre-treating fuels using hand crews to cut and pile material and underburning during the spring and fall. Thinning of under story trees would occur where trees exceed 300 stems per acre and ground fuel loadings are too heavy to allow a first entry prescribed burn. After treatment by hand crews, a broadcast under burn may be prescribed the following spring or fall to further reduce existing ground fuel loadings.

The priority for treatment would be the drier pine dominated sites. Pine stands typically have a longer seasonal burning window and thus present a higher fire hazard than the moister fir dominated sites. After the pine stands are completed, the emphasis would shift to the fir dominated sites.

## **Design Features**

Design features are actions taken as part of a proposal to reduce or avoid negative effects of a proposed action.

*Avoidance of sensitive species habitat:* Northern goshawk and other sensitive species or habitat would be avoided. In general, treatments would be scheduled to avoid or minimize disturbance of wildlife.

*Slash pile burning:* Slash piles would be burned in winter or early spring when the chance of the fire spreading or broadcasting through the unit is unlikely.

*Cultural resources:* All cultural resources would be avoided during treatment.

## **Your Comments and Concerns**

At this time, the proposed Castle Rock Fuels Treatment Project is being planned to delineate those areas that would be most appropriate and beneficial for fuels treatment. The overall goal of the treatment is to reduce the fire hazard in the event of a wildfire.

During this scoping period, we request your input into the planning process. Differing perspectives may help in the identification of issues and concerns that we may have overlooked. The BLM welcomes your comments, suggestions, and concerns regarding this proposal. Please send your written feedback to Randy Eyre, at the above address by May 31, 2003. Further, if you have any additional questions, kindly contact Mr. Eyre by phone at (541) 473-6279

Sincerely,

s/Tom Dabbs

Tom Dabbs  
Malheur Field Office Manager

Encl.: map of the project area

